

Portal

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 This article is an expansion based on a canon element. For canon information on this topic, follow the link to The Witcher Wiki: [Portal](#).

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A **portal** is a spell of the element of ether which creates two tears at separate points in reality, temporarily linking them through the ethereal plane. This plane is then traversed in order to travel rapidly from one location to another, since within it neither matter nor time exists. It is an extremely complex spell that only highly talented and experienced mages can perform with relative safety — and even then, never entirely without risk, due to the use of an alien reality as its conduit.

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Portal



Details

Element(s)	Ether
Type	Teleportation
User(s)	Mages and other magical occupations of similar power

How a Portal Works

The functioning of a portal is relatively straightforward. Once both tears in reality have been created, a black vortex surrounded by spiraling energy appears. After a brief moment, the dark vortex begins to clear, revealing the destination on the other side. It then gradually darkens again until it finally collapses in on itself and vanishes. The time required for the full process depends on the type of portal involved (and therefore on the amount of ether used in its creation).

Use of Portals

Portals are primarily used for the rapid transportation of their caster or companions from one place to another. However, over the centuries many mages have developed alternative applications for them, even for those that were poorly cast. These uses include transporting creatures from elsewhere to the mage's home so they may defend it from intruders, moving objects, redirecting spells cast from a distant location, or — in the case of miscast portals — employing them as methods of torture, mainly psychological, during interrogations.

This practice was particularly notorious during the golden years of the Praetorship. Records describe instances in which this mage-police force created portals specifically designed to connect to auxiliary torture chambers in order to extract information more easily. One especially infamous example involved a portal whose exit opened into a pit filled with starving crocodiles.

Limitations and Dangers of Portals

“I hate portals”

—Geralt of Rivia, witcher of the School of the Wolf

Portals possess numerous limitations; they are not something that can be cast carelessly without considering everything such magic entails.

First, one must extract ether element, which is extremely difficult due to its nature, and clearly visualize both points of travel: where one currently is, and where one intends to go.

Second, it requires the mage to be capable of casting ether-based spells in the first place — or, failing that, to transmute other elements into ether in order to perform the spell, something that is notably complex.

Third, flawless gesturing is required, otherwise the portal may form incorrectly, trapping the mage within the ethereal plane and killing them almost instantly due to its highly alien nature (which is why one remains there only for a brief instant when crossing a portal) — or worse, leaving them torn apart upon exit.

Fourth, portals — with the exception of those formed by natural phenomena such as the [Ard Gaeths](#), which are in fact major nodes within the [Spiral](#) and therefore not true portals — suffer from a problem so simple yet so severe that it explains why the spell has never been standardized as a common method of travel: long-distance stability. Even when cast perfectly, opening a tear in two points of material reality toward the ethereal plane causes reality itself to react defensively, sealing those ruptures to prevent being consumed or destabilized. The greater the distance bridged, the larger the portion of reality that “*leaks*,” and thus the faster the entry and exit points begin to collapse, rendering portals unstable and dangerous. At any moment one might suffer the fate described in the third point — or, if one survives long enough to be rescued and somehow returns to the material plane with their limbs intact, which is highly unlikely, they may come back utterly mad.

The madness mentioned above stems simply from the alien nature of that reality. As neither matter, nor time, nor heat — among many other fundamental properties — exist there, the senses collapse first, followed by the mind itself, leaving it damaged upon returning to the material world.

This instability can be partially mitigated through magical mechanisms designed to hold both ruptures open long enough; however, even then, vast quantities of ether element are required to keep them functioning. Moreover, such mechanisms may fail, causing the portal to become — quite literally — unstable once more, which can lead to death in more new ways or send the traveler somewhere unintended, sometimes entirely at random.

Fifth, since ether is the very foundation of phenomena such as [spirits](#) — and

because greater distances demand larger quantities of ether element for the spell to function properly, as previously mentioned — a mage may unknowingly begin drawing from their own life force during the extraction process. This can ultimately lead to death in various unpleasant and the different than the previous ones ways, or, upon emerging from the portal, leave the caster so utterly exhausted that they are unable to draw upon magic again until after a period of recovery, rendering them weak and highly vulnerable to enemies.

Sixth and finally, the distance a portal can cover does not depend solely on the factors mentioned above, but also on the amount of ether a mage invests into the spell. No matter how clearly the caster visualizes both locations, they will not reach the intended destination unless the proper quantity of ether is used for the distance they wish to traverse. Otherwise, the portal will simply deposit them in a location that is only relatively close to where they meant to arrive.

Classification of Portals

Portals can be classified into three main groups: created portals, mechanism-based portals, and natural portals (with Ard Gaeths excluded from this category for the reasons previously mentioned). Across all three groups, a color-based classification is commonly used; these colors primarily indicate how much ether has been employed and, therefore, the distance a portal can cover. In some cases, however, the color serves only as an indicator of direction, reflecting the type of casting focus used rather than the distance itself.

Although most portals are cast using ether, there exists one exceptional case: the spell [Portus Asterum](#), created by the mage Democritus of Ban Ard, which employs stellar magic.

However, since very little is known about stellar magic — much like with [chasm magic](#) — and it is equally difficult to extract, the reason why this portal functions through a different form of magic remains unknown. The most popular theory suggests that stellar magic is actually a set of unique, cosmic-scale combinations — hence why it can only be drawn during specific celestial alignments — of the energies from all elemental and para-elemental planes, including those still undiscovered, which would be what enables the spell to function.

In that sense, using a painting analogy, it would be like having a palette where all the colors are mixed together, yet still distinct enough to be used individually:

you could paint with white — the fusion of all colors (that is, ether); create softer variations of stronger tones by mixing white with another color (that is, using a para-element for a spell); or directly use that blended mixture itself, carrying subtle hints of every color here and there (that is, employing stellar magic).

Thus, the chromatic scale of portals from highest to lowest is as follows:

Iridescent: Natural minor nodes within the Spiral. Technically, much like the Ard Gaeths, they should not be considered true portals for similar reasons; however, due to their very similar appearance and vaguely comparable behavior, they have been classified as such. They are the only members of the natural category.

Red: Cosmic-scale distances, nearly immeasurable. This is the color associated with the portal of the spell *Portus Asterum* (Scholar's Tongue: *Star Gate*). Technically, it is possible to step through the portal and attempt travel to the destination world. However, due to the overwhelming instability caused by the interplanetary scale, such an attempt would almost certainly result in the caster being torn apart in the transit.

Pink: Very long distances, though not global in scope — essentially continental-scale travel. One of the hardest types of portals to create.

Orange: Long interregional distances, primarily covering what would be the equivalent of two to four regions. Together with yellow, it represents the standard range for most portals.

Yellow: Long distances, though not as extensive as the previous categories, as they usually cover only a single region. Part of the group of created portals, alongside orange, pink, and red.

Blue: Medium distances. Used primarily in mechanism-based portals equipped with a crystal receiver that converts any type of magical energy into ether in order to activate it.

Green: Another type of mechanism-based portal. Employed for short-range travel, typically covering a radius between 200 and 500 square kilometers (depending on the portal's shade).

Purple: The last portal within the mechanism-based group. Used for very short distances, usually covering a radius of barely 100 square kilometers.

Brown: The most notable example of a directional portal. Its color indicates descent in altitude. Unlike other portals, it connects point A to point B only in latitude, not longitude, due to the specific casting focus required to create it, as mentioned previously.

Gray: The second and final type of directional portal. Functions the same as the brown portal, but in the opposite manner.

Alternatives to Portals

Beyond traditional methods of travel, there exists no fast alternative capable of competing with portals. Some mages have proposed that a spell capable of disassembling a person and instantly reassembling them at the destination might serve as one, thus eliminating the dangers associated with portals. Unfortunately, the level of complexity required to create such a spell — surpassing even that of a portal — remains beyond the reach of human magic. As a result, it is still considered preferable to accept the risks inherent to portal travel or rely on conventional means instead.

History

Pre-human Times

The first beings in the world known to have used portals were none other than the generally anti-magical vrans, the lizardfolk. Through a specialized caste known as the [Operators](#) or Guardians, they were capable of opening iridescent-type portals thanks to their immense magical aptitude — a power so vast that it allowed them to manipulate both time and space. It is believed that the extensive development of portal-related knowledge achieved by the next race to dominate large parts of the [Old Continent](#) was made possible by what the vrans learned through the Operators' abilities.

Unfortunately, the Operators were nearly driven to extinction during conflicts with other races, and much of the knowledge they had not shared with the rest

of vran society was lost alongside them, as most vrans lacked the capacity to wield such magic. The last known Operator was supposedly slain by a [white-haired witcher](#) in 1271.

Regarding the role of the Operators within vran society, little is known with certainty. It is believed that they likely acted as a blend between the elven Aen Saevherne and Navigators, and that they were probably the ones who guided the vrans from somewhere in the multiverse into the reality of [Nátalam](#).

The Age of Migration

Thus, the first magical users to employ portals in a more advanced and structured manner were the [elves](#) — particularly portals belonging to the mechanism-based group. At some point during their golden age, and most likely throughout the Age of Migration, their portal-craft reached an extraordinary level of sophistication thanks to the surviving vran knowledge. This progress allowed them to create two types of mechanism-based portals that no human mage has ever been able to replicate, as the knowledge behind them — much like that of the Operators — was forever lost during later conflicts with other races.

These were Tor Lara and Tor Zirael. Tor Lara was a pink-type portal once linked to Tor Zirael, but at some point during the wars with humans it became unstable. Tor Zirael itself possessed a far more extraordinary function: according to [the Black Book of Ellander](#), after revealing itself to certain chosen figures, it could open iridescent-type portals leading to other realities across the [multiverse](#) without the need to rely on the Ard Gaeths, which were sealed following the [First Conjunction](#).

Discovery of Portals by Humanity

Leaving aside the fact that, like many of the races present in the world, humans largely arrived through the Ard Gaeths — which they most likely mythologized and therefore never developed into the concept of a “portal” — the oldest known records of what would become the modern magical understanding of portals among humans date back to the 3rd century After the Conjunction (around the 5th century After the Resurrection in the Nordling calendar). These records originate from [Melukka](#), more specifically from what is now the city-state of Chalotra, preserved in an anonymous source. In this text, the concept appears under the name *vitaratidvausthala* (*to traverse two places*), and the author was presumably a mage,

an apprentice of a mage, or someone with comparable magical training.

Human Portals

The development of portal techniques among humans emerged from the limited knowledge they acquired through the elves during the shift in the world's dominant race.

This progress began roughly around the 10th century, thanks to mages such as [Ransant Alvaro](#), author of works like [The Gates of Mystery](#) and [The Secret Gates](#). However, a reliable standard — essentially the modern standard — would not be achieved until three centuries later, nearly the mid-13th century, when studies conducted by the mages of [Rissberg Castle](#) advanced the knowledge of portal magic enough to allow practitioners to travel swiftly with far fewer risks than in earlier eras.

As a curious note, it is worth mentioning that during the 11th and 12th centuries there was a firm belief that the color of a portal after casting depended on the caster's emotional state at the moment of the spell. However, several portal-related incidents, together with the (re)discovery of members of the mechanism-based portal group, ultimately proved this belief to be false.

Image Credits

- *Portal Gwent Card Art* by Volmi Games.
- *Masterful Portal Gwent Card Art* by Katarzyna Bekus.

Trivia

- Technically, according to [The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt](#), orange portals would fulfill the role of iridescent ones based on how they are used in the quest [Through Time and Space](#). However, this can be explained by the extensive changes the third act underwent during the game's final development, which likely prevented the creation of new assets due to time constraints.
 - The idea that a portal's color depends on the caster's emotional state is a nod to a theory that emerged shortly after *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* was released, which suggested exactly that.
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